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GIFT IDEA

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metroLIFE

Martin Janson climbs Blackcomb Mountain in 2014. That fall, the young Australian died at Whistler. He would have been 22 today.

COURTESY JENNIFER JANSON

DIRE WARNING

Grieving mother — whose son died of a drug overdose — has message for New Year's Eve revellers metroNEWS

Donations drop as housing costs rise in province

CHARITY

Incomes have fallen behind the cost of living, survey finds

Matt Kieltyka
Metro | Vancouver

Charitable donations have plummeted as more British Columbians struggle with high housing costs, unaffordability and stagnant wages, according to a new survey.

Credit union Vancity recently commissioned a survey of 800 British Columbians and released a report Wednesday that found a 25 per cent decrease in the number of people donating money to charities and non-profit organizations over the last five years.

In the same period, the size of people's donations shrunk nine per cent, on average.

Eighty-two per cent of respondents said economic factors, such as low incomes, the cost of living and the state of the economy, prevented them from donating more.

The decline in donations is indicative of a larger issue in society, the survey found.

Sixty-nine per cent of people reported their incomes have fallen behind the cost of living.

"We're very connected to not-for-profits and mission-based groups and we've been hearing from them the feeling that donations and contributions aren't the same as it has been in the last few years," said Vancity senior vice-president Linda Morris. "(The survey) does seem to verify that indeed the percentage of British Columbians making donations has dropped quite considerably. The why was housing unaffordability, first and foremost, that means people are stretched and they feel like their wages aren't keeping up with the variety of rising costs."

The good news, Morris said, is that people are still committed to helping their communities.

Volunteering remained unchanged at 38 per cent, and 58 per cent of people intend to maintain their commitment to charities they care about.

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Mark Zuckerberg unveils artificial intelligence assistant named Jarvis, voiced by Morgan Freeman.

‘Don’t leave your friends alone’

DRUGS

An Australian mother’s plea during overdose crisis

Stuart Neatby
For Metro | Vancouver

The mother of a young traveller who died of an accidental overdose in Whistler has advice for New Year’s Eve revelers who may be considering experimenting with recreational drugs: Don’t use alone.

Jennifer Janson’s son Martin passed away during the fall of 2014 of an accidental overdose involving cocaine and over the counter sleeping pills. The Australian traveller would have turned 22 on Thursday.

For many in B.C, Martin Janson’s death has served as a grim reminder that the risks of drug use, particularly heightened by the fentanyl crisis, are now extreme even for occasional, recreational users.

Two years later, Jennifer remembers her son as happy, athletic and outgoing. He had just finished high school, and had plans to travel to Europe.

“This is why it’s so upsetting because he was one of the most beautiful, generous, friendly go-to person that you could ever have,” she said, speaking via Skype from Australia.

Martin Janson, like many 19-year-olds working in the service industry, had gone out with some friends to a club on a Monday night.

Family and friends adorn Martin Janson’s coffin with messages. JENNIFER JANSON/CONTRIBUTED

After staying out late, he and his friends returned to staff housing where his parents believe they did cocaine. At some point in the evening, Jennifer believes Martin asked a friend for sleeping pills, and then retired to his room.

According to Carrie Stefanson, a public affairs officer with Vancouver Coastal Health, it is not known exactly what caused the overdose, although the sleeping pills were a factor.

“Her son didn’t know what he was taking,” she said. “It could have been laced with fentanyl. We don’t know.”

According to Stefanson, from January to December of this year, the Howe Sound region saw 111 overdoses, often involving a mixture of alcohol and other substances.

The Whistler newspaper the Pique reported in October that 23 overdose deaths had occurred in the North Shore/Coast Garibaldi region this year.

The B.C. Coroner Service has reported that 755 drug overdose deaths have occurred in B.C. this year. Many of these individuals were recreational users.

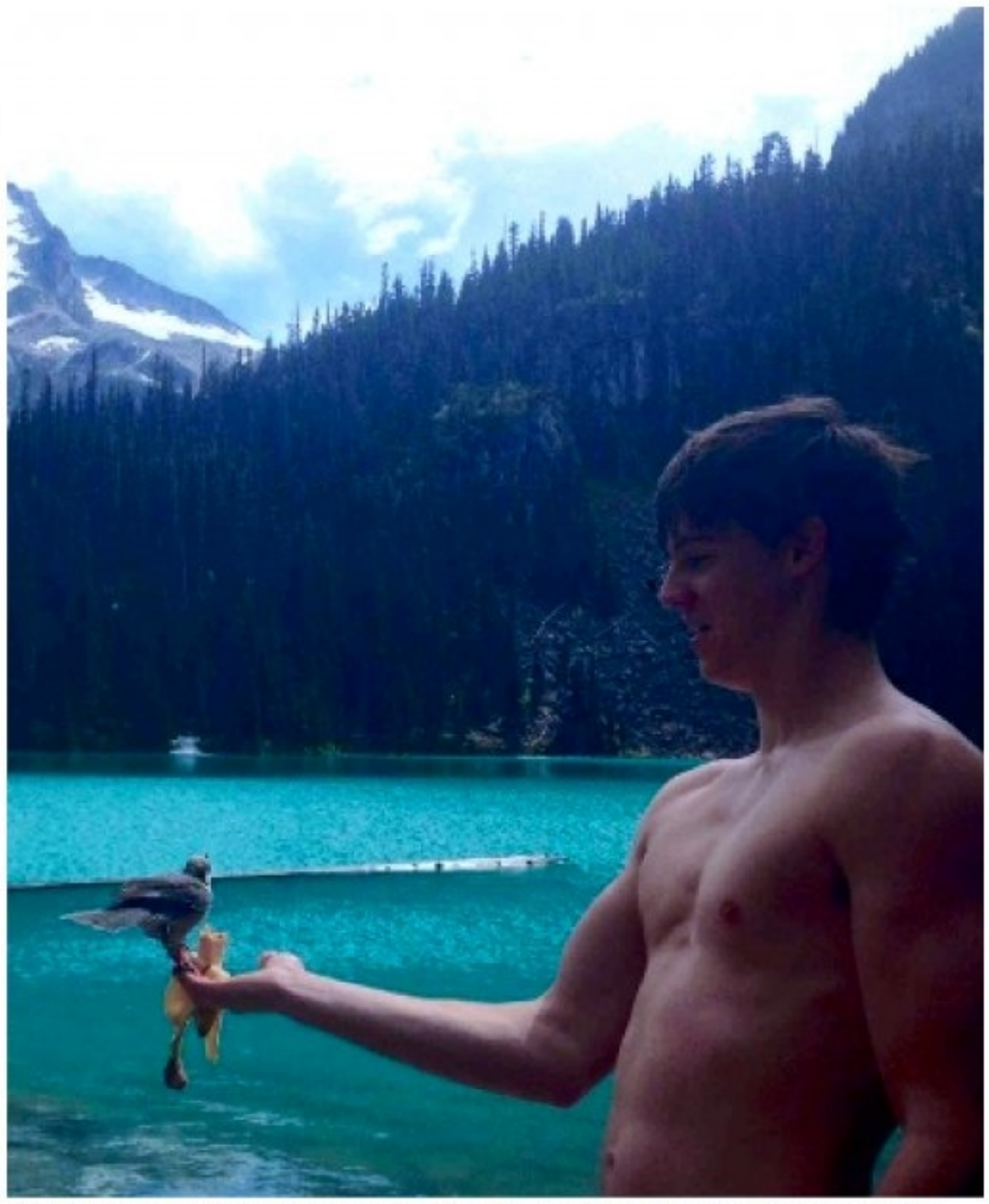
Although fentanyl has been cut into opiates like heroin and OxyContin, it has also shown up in party drugs like cocaine.

“It’s important to recognize that the drugs out there are really, really dangerous,” said Barb McLintock, a coroner with the B.C. Coroners Service.

McLintock said that people need to be aware of the risks involved with drug use during the holiday season. She also stressed the need for drug use to never be a solo experience.

Jennifer Janson echoed this message.

“If you’re going to try something, don’t do it alone. Marty died alone,” she said.



Martin Janson feeds a bird at Joffre Lake. The 19-year-old died of an accidental overdose in September of 2014. JENNIFER JANSON/CONTRIBUTED

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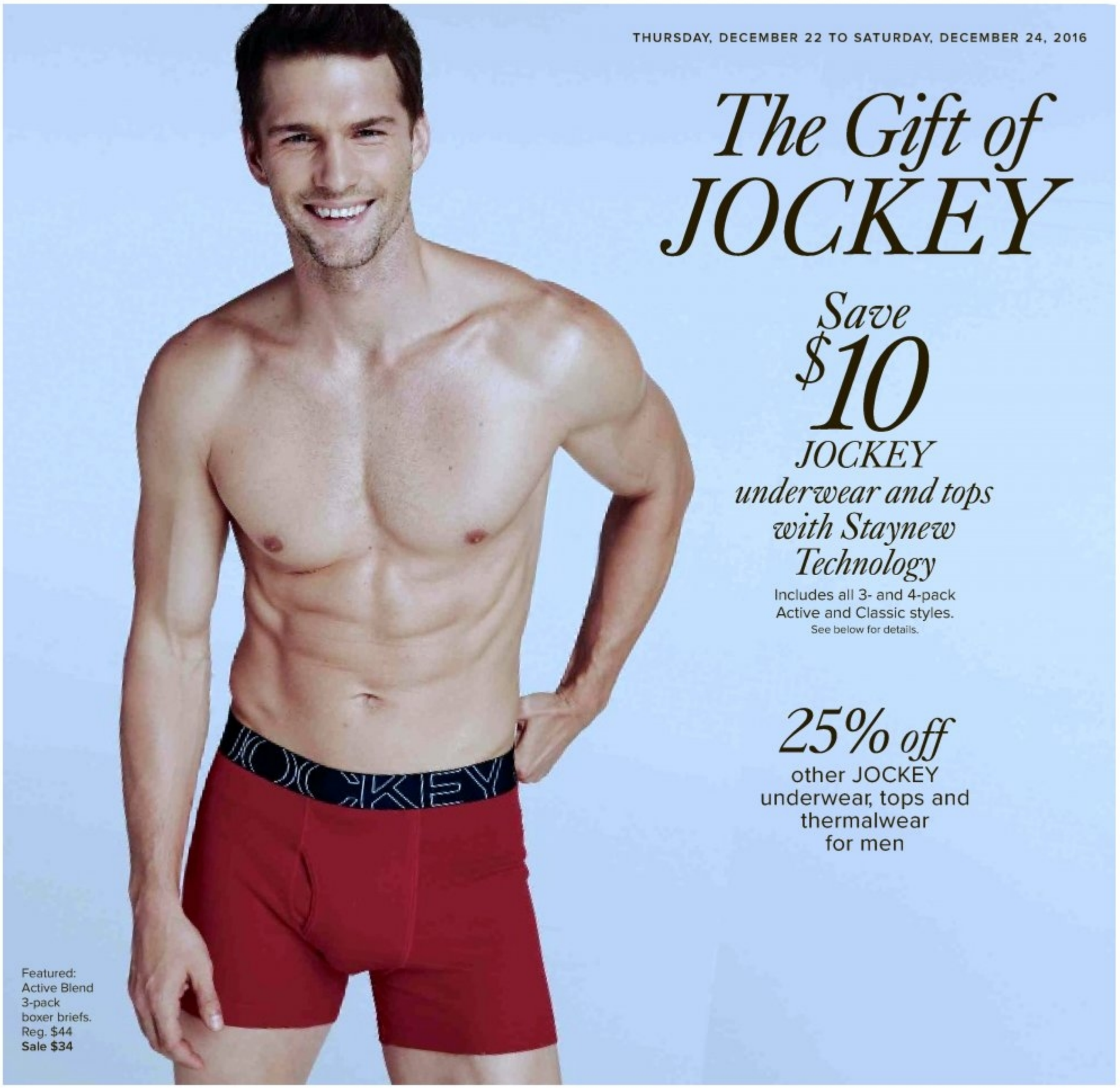
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City pilot pays for housing

EXPERIMENT

Modular build offers quick solution to homelessness

Jen St. Denis
Metro | Vancouver

The City of Vancouver plans to pay for the entire cost of building, operating and subsidizing rent in order to create a temporary, quick-to-build apartment building that city councillors and staff see as a future model to quickly house people who are at risk of homelessness.

The city, which had planned to spend $3.5 million to build the three-storey modular structure, now also plans to pay for a rent subsidy totalling $222,000 in order to bridge the gap between the income assistance shelter rate of $375 and the break-even rent rate of $850.

The city's housing agency, not a third-party operator as was initially planned, will manage the building at a cost of $285,000 a year.

"This was a pilot," said Mukhtar Latif, chief housing officer for the City of Vancouver. "We really wanted to move forward quickly and not just wait for government funding to come in because that would have delayed the process.

"But we've been having ongoing dialogue with senior levels of government so we're hopeful they're going to come to the table."

Horizon North, a Calgary company that specializes in manufacturing and constructing modular housing, is currently constructing the building on a city-owned lot at Main and Terminal. Modular housing, which is constructed in pieces in a factory, then shipped to a site and put together, is normally used to build temporary work camps for oil and gas and mining in northern B.C. and Alberta.

But city staff believe the speedy and cheaper construction method could help boost housing supply in Vancouver, not just for the most needy, but eventually for students and residents who make a range of incomes. The building at Main and Terminal will be completed in just six months, and be ready for people to move in mid-February.

Latif said Vancouver's housing agency plans to move the current occupants of a city-owned and operated single-room occupancy (SRO) hotel on Alexander Street into the Main and Terminal building. People who were being housed temporarily in the Quality Inn will then be able to move into the SRO.

In 2014, the city moved people who had been living in a tent city at Oppenheimer Park to the vacant Quality Inn at Howe and Drake.

Coun. Kerry Jang said the modular apartment building, which will have 250-square foot suites with their own small kitchens and bathrooms, offers better housing than an SRO, where bathrooms and showers are normally shared.

The city has identified 10 possible future sites for more modular buildings. Latif said his staff is also looking to partner with non-profit and faith-based organizations who may be able to provide land for future projects.

Modular units are assembled at Vancouver's first temporary modular housing project at 220 Terminal Ave. on Wednesday. JENNIFER GAUTHIER/FOR METRO

> We really wanted to move forward quickly and not just wait for government funding to come in because that would have delayed the process. Mukhtar Latif

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He's the wrong man to rob

CRIME

Ex-MMA fighter tracks down and pins suspect, selfie goes viral

Stuart Neatby
For Metro | Vancouver

A Vernon man's selfie has gone viral, after he apprehended a suspected thief hours after a break-in and snapped a shot to prove it.

After thieves stole his wallet, jacket and a pair of gloves from his truck on Monday morning, Kevin Barkhouse and his brother decided to try checking pawnshops in the area to see if anything would turn up. They soon noticed two men at a phone booth, one of whom appeared to be wearing Barkhouse's jacket.

Barkhouse, a former MMA fighter, said the two men were initially co-operative when he asked them about the jacket, and even began emptying out their bags. But after he noticed that the two had begun slowing down, he asked them to show him the bottom of their bags.

"As soon as I said that, one guy ran, the other guy started backing up," said Barkhouse.

Barkhouse then grabbed inside the bag of the remaining man, pulling out his wallet. He then pinned the man down, as his brother ran into a nearby store to call police. That was when Barkhouse snapped a selfie of him on top of the suspect.

"I don't really know, I figured why not?" said Barkhouse, explaining his reasoning behind the photo. "The selfie was mainly to send to my buddies."

Vernon RCMP charged the 25-year-old suspect with possession of property obtained by crime, and possession of break-in instruments.

Kevin Barkhouse's selfie FACEBOOK

Bus routes are changing
The opening of the Evergreen Extension provides an opportunity to revise the bus network to better meet community needs and provide more direct connections to SkyTrain and West Coast Express.
Starting Monday, December 19, some of the bus routes in the Tri-Cities and surrounding areas will change.
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MUNICIPAL EMPLOYMENT

Banked sick days rack up $90 million

Wanyee Li
Metro | Vancouver

One business organization says some Metro Vancouver municipalities are giving their employees too much leeway when it comes to banking sick days, leaving taxpayers with $90 million in liability.

For instance, City of Vancouver employees receive 20 paid sick days per year and can bank up to 261 of them. Employees cannot cash them out. But they can bank 120 gratuity days (paid days they receive if they do not take any sick days in a given year) and cash those out when they leave the public service.

If its employees took their sick days all at once, the city would need to pay an additional $35.7 million, according to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB).

"It doesn't make fiscal sense. It leaves a large liability on the books of any organization," said Richard Truscott, CFIB vice-president.

Only three per cent of private-sector employers allow their workers to bank sick days, he pointed out.

"It's simply unfair. You don't find this kind of thing for people outside the public sector."

Vancouver is second only to Richmond in the amount of liability it holds due to banked sick days, according to CFIB.

The City of Vancouver confirmed in an emailed statement that most of its unionized employees receive an allotted number of sick days and are able to bank them up to a certain limit.

But that policy is unfair to new employees, said Truscott.

"If you have only worked there for six months or a year, you have less coverage than someone who has been there for 20 years," he explained.

He says replacing banked sick days with a short-term disability plan would ensure all employees receive the same support if they became sick.

Some city employees are, in fact, covered for short-term disability but most do not have access to a long-term disability plan and only have their banked sick days to rely on, a City of Vancouver spokesperson pointed out.

The spokesperson also noted that about 2,400 employees (out of approximately 10,000) do not have contracts that allow them to accumulate sick days.

Burnaby and New Westminster do not allow their employees to bank sick days.

Pup saved by naloxone after ingesting opioid

A puppy is lucky to be alive after ingesting what vets believe was an opioid during a walk in Victoria.

The five-month-old pooch, Chica, appeared wobbly and sleepy, prompting its owners to head to the vet clinic right away.

"We knew that she had ingested something but we weren't sure what. We treated her for toxicity and over the course of the next hour she went from wobbly and spacey to pretty much comatose," said Dr. Helen Rae, owner of McKenzie Veterinary Services.

With the dog lying unresponsive on the table, Rae administered the only thing she thought could help — naloxone. It worked.

Rae told Metro this is only the second time she has encountered an opioid overdose in the 18 years she has worked as a vet.

She says the diagnosis was an educated guess based on the pug cross's symptoms.

WANYEE LI/METRO

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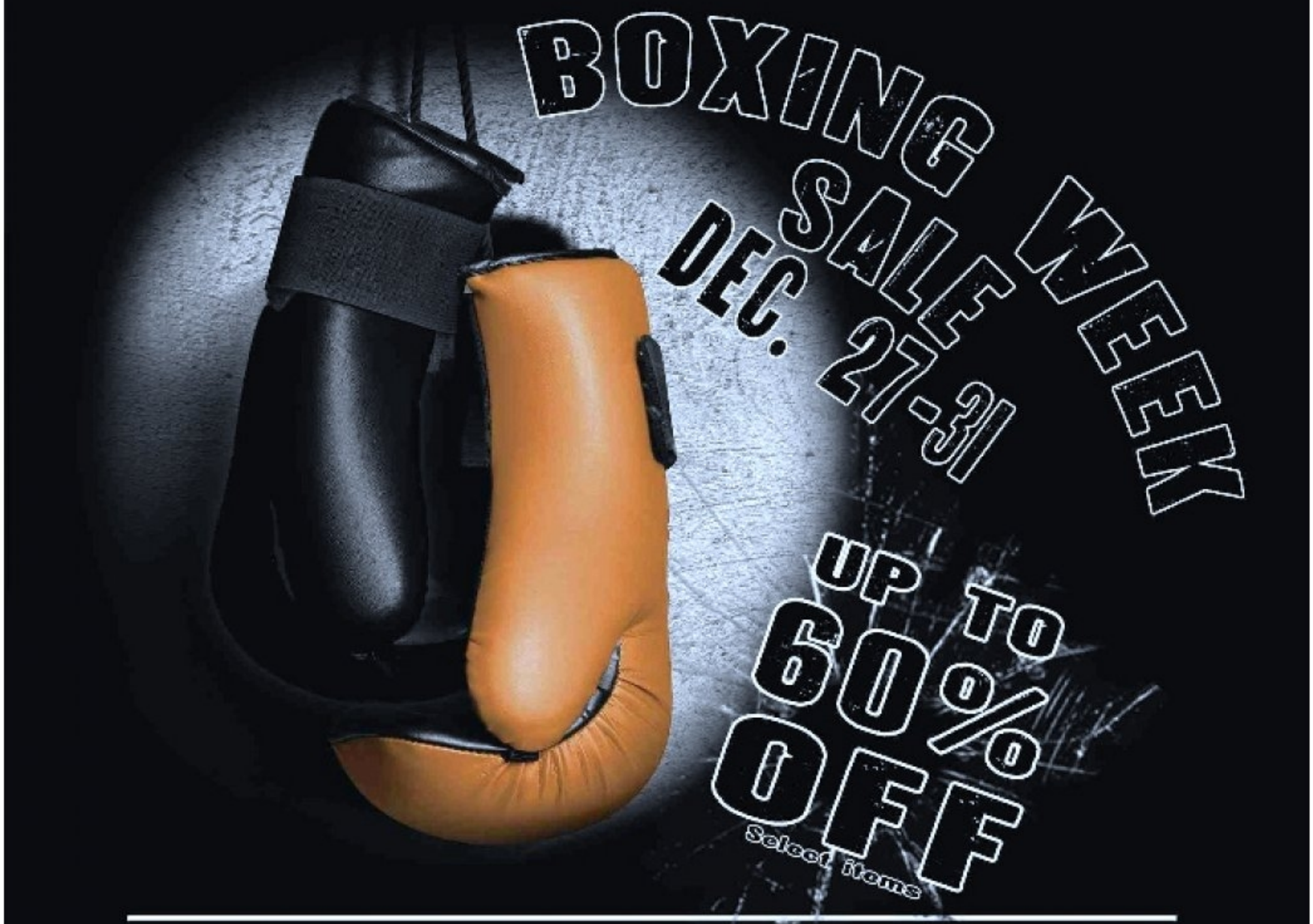

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AFGHANISTAN

First sight of grandchildren: In hostage video

The parents of a Canadian man held hostage in Afghanistan say a recently released video of their son and his family marks the first time they've seen their two grandchildren, who were born in captivity.

Canadian Joshua Boyle and his American wife, Caitlan Coleman, were kidnapped in 2012 while travelling in a mountainous region of northern Afghanistan.

In a video uploaded to YouTube, Coleman — sitting next to her husband and two young children — urges governments on all sides to reach a deal to secure the family's freedom.

Boyle's parents, Patrick and Linda Boyle, said they watched the video on Monday, getting their first glimpse at their young grandsons.

"It is an indescribable emotional sense one has watching a grandson making faces at the camera, while hearing our son's leg chains clanging up and down on the floor," the Boyles said.

The parents say their son told them in a letter that he and his wife have tried to protect their children by pretending their signs of captivity are part of a game being played with guards.

"It is simply heartbreaking to watch both boys so keenly observing their new surroundings in a makeshift film studio, while listening to their mother describe how they were made to watch her being defiled," the Boyles said. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Joshua Boyle and Caitlan Coleman's children. TWITTER

Jeanette MacDonald was bruised after a home invasion at her basement apartment. JEFF HARPER/METRO

Attacker was 'just a punk'

HALIFAX

Senior recounts brutal attack that outraged a city

Zane Woodford
Metro | Halifax

An 85-year-old woman says she was "petrified" as she was repeatedly punched in the face and dragged from her home during a brutal assault in Halifax.

Police say they were called to Jeanette MacDonald's home Tuesday night.

MacDonald said she was home alone when there was a knock at the door. She called out to ask who was there, and when there was no answer, she went to the door.

"I opened the door, and the first thing he said was, 'Give me the money.' I said, 'What the hell are you talking about, I'm not giving you no money.' And he hit me with his fist in my face," MacDonald said in an interview Wednesday morning.

MacDonald said the man, who she'd never seen before, told her he had a gun and knife. She continued to refuse his demands for money, and he dragged her outside.

"He said, 'Here's one for ya,' and he let me have it right in the face again," she said.

MacDonald's neighbours rushed to her side when they heard her cries for help.

"I was screaming, I couldn't stand the pain," MacDonald said.

She said the suspect ran away behind her home.

"Just a punk, that's all he was," MacDonald said.

Paramedics treated MacDonald's injuries at the scene. On Wednesday morning, she had two black eyes, a large bruise on her chest, and her hand was swollen.

"I'm not feeling too bad now, like I was at first, but I'm sore," she said.

Halifax police spokeswoman Const. Dianne Penfound said Wednesday afternoon that police had no further leads or information on the case.

Woman claims she was fired for lack of heels

Haley Ryan
Metro | Halifax

A Dartmouth single mom is questioning whether her recent firing from a popular Halifax nightclub was over high heels, but her employer says they did everything "in line with labour standards."

Ally Robinson, 25, said she's worked in the service industry for years, including at Grafton Connor Group locations like Cheers, and as a bartender at The Dome since October. Last Friday, Robinson said a manager sent her home for not wearing high heels during her shift.

The next day, Robinson said she was dismissed by the same woman who told her she was being let go due to not wearing heels, but then added, according to Robinson, "I don't need to give you a reason at all," because the 25-year-old was still under the probation period.

"It doesn't seem fair," Robinson says.

Robinson said she'd had issues with that particular manager harassing her since she began working at The Dome, and shaming her in front of other employees.

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Officials walk through the rubble of the San Pablito fireworks market that exploded in Tultepec on the outskirts of Mexico City, on Wednesday. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Search for loved ones and answers

SAN PABLITO

Officials say it's too early to identify cause of explosion

Relatives of workers at a fireworks market flattened by a deadly chain-reaction explosion searched hospitals for loved ones Wednesday as attention focused on apparent lax security that allowed vendors to display their dangerous wares in the passageways between stalls.

Health Secretary Cesar Gomez Monge of Mexico State, where the San Pablito Market is located, said another victim died in a hospital, raising the fatal toll to 32. About 46 people remained hospitalized, five of them in such serious condition that they were fighting for their lives, he added. Ten of the injured were minors including one girl with burns over 90 per cent of her body.

Juana Antolina Hernandez, who has run a stand for 22 years in San Pablito next to one operated by her parents, escaped the market in a mad dash when the explosions began Tuesday afternoon. The following day she was one of the disconsolate residents waiting outside a local morgue.

"I can't find my father, and my mother is very badly burned," said Hernandez, 49. "I am waiting here for them to tell me if my father is here, but up to this point, nothing."

San Pablito was especially well stocked for the holidays and bustling with hundreds of shoppers when the blast reduced the market to a stark expanse of ash, rubble and the scorched metal, casting a pall over the Christmas season. Dramatic video of the explosion showed a towering plume of smoke that was lit up by a staccato of bangs and flashes of light, the third such incident to ravage the market on the northern outskirts of Mexico's capital since 2005. Officials said it was too early to identify a cause of the blasts. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BERLIN

Officials monitored truck attack suspect

German officials had deemed the Tunisian man being sought in a manhunt across Europe a threat long before a truck plowed into a Christmas market in Berlin — and even kept him under covert surveillance for six months this year before halting the operation.

Now the international manhunt for Anis Amri — considered the prime suspect in Monday's deadly rampage — is raising questions about how closely German authorities are monitoring the hundreds of known Islamic extremists in the country. The issue puts new pressure on Chancellor Angela Merkel, who is being lambasting her for allowing hundreds of thousands of asylum-seekers to enter the country. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TURKEY

Erdogan says assassin linked to U.S. cleric

Turkey's president on Wednesday implicated a U.S.-based Muslim cleric in the killing of Russia's envoy to Turkey, saying the policeman who carried out the attack was a member of his "terror organization."

Ambassador Andrei Karlov was killed Monday by a gunman in front of stunned onlookers at a photo exhibition in Ankara. The assassin, Mevlut Mert Altintas of Ankara's riot police squad, was killed in a police operation.

"He (Altintas) was a member of the FETO terrorist organization. There is no point in hiding this," President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said during a joint news conference with his visiting Albanian counterpart. "From the places he was raised to his connections — that's what they point at."

Turkey has accused Fethullah Gulen — a former ally who has turned into Erdogan's top foe — of trying to destabilize Turkey and says his movement is behind a failed military coup in July aimed at toppling the Turkish leader. Gulen has denied any involvement in the coup. His movement also condemned "in the strongest terms" the ambassador's assassination.

Turkey is pressing the U.S. to extradite Gulen so he may be prosecuted for the coup attempt and other alleged crimes.

Erdogan said that Turkey's intelligence agency was also looking into Altintas' possible foreign connections, saying there were "certain clues" indicating overseas links. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ALSO IN TURKEY

Bana Alabed, a seven-year-old Syrian girl who was evacuated Monday from Aleppo and whose mother ran a Twitter account in her name met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Ankara. The account has garnered some 354,000 followers.

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A herder walks past a pile of dead animals in the hills of Hentii, Mongolia, after a severe snowstorm in 2001. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Aids groups warn of crisis in Mongolia

EXTREME WEATHER

Livestock being decimated by an usually harsh winter

Another unusually harsh winter in Mongolia that's decimating livestock and sending temperatures to -56 C may create a humanitarian crisis, with worse conditions still to come, aid groups warn.

Save the Children and the International Federation of the Red Cross said Wednesday that this winter will likely see vast swathes of the Mongolian steppe affected by the extreme weather phenomenon known in Mongolia as "dzud."

A dzud typically happens once a decade but could strike for the second consecutive year. The dzud last year killed more than a million animals, afflicting the majority of Mongolians who depend on livestock for food, milk and income.

The Mongolian government said last week it met with international organizations including Save the Children, the Red Cross and the United Nations Development Program to discuss efforts to deliver heating, fuel and medical supplies amid "worsening" conditions and heavy snowfall since October.

Aid groups say the situation is compounded by last year's harsh winter and a deep recession amid a market bust for Mongolia's mineral exports. The country is struggling to repay debt with its hard currency stocks while household savings have also evaporated.

Red Cross disaster program manager in Mongolia Davaajargal Batdorj said more livestock deaths are expected this year with far northwestern areas of the country already buried under one metre of snow. The organization will begin sending cash to herder families in the far west in the coming weeks.

"It's a natural disaster on top of an economic crisis," Davaajargal said. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

AFRICA

'Enough is enough' in Congo

Mediators urged Congo's president and opposition parties Wednesday to reach an agreement before Christmas on a peaceful settlement to the country's political crisis, saying dozens already have been killed this week amid protests over the president's stay in power.

"Enough is enough," said Monseigneur Marcel Utembi with the team of Catholic church mediators. "A solution must be found as soon as possible by all political actors, but in particular by the government in order to reassure the Congolese people."

He also conveyed a message from Pope Francis following their meeting this week: "I am concerned by what is happening in your country, which I wish to visit at the opportune moment. I pray for the Congolese people, who need peace so much now."

Priests arrive for a meeting in Kinshasa on Wednesday. JOHN BOMPENGO/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

President Joseph Kabila's mandate ended this week and he is constitutionally barred from seeking another term, but a court has ruled that he can remain in power until new elections, which have been indefinitely delayed. The vote once was set for November, but the ruling party now says it won't be held until 2018.

Anger over the delay has swept the country. A heavy military and police presence remained in the capital, Kinshasa, and across the country Wednesday. Reports of the death toll in the chaos varied. Human Rights Watch said security forces killed 26 people. The UN peacekeeping mission in Congo said it had documented 19 people shot to death, 45 wounded and a "very high number" of arrests in Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, Matadi and Goma. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Broadband a basic service: Regulator

INTERNET ACCESS

Providers must offer unlimited options, speeds of 50 Mbps

CRTC chairman Jean-Pierre Blais announces the ruling on basic telecommunications service. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Canada's telecom regulator has declared broadband Internet access a basic service across the country, just like current landline telephone service.

But making full access to ultra-high-speed services a reality could cost tens of billions of dollars, and the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission said Wednesday that achieving the goal will take a co-ordinated effort by it, businesses and governments.

The aim is to ensure service providers (ISPs) offer Internet services nationwide at speeds of at least 50 megabits per second for downloading data, and 10 Mbps for uploads, the CRTC said in announcing the new targets. Currently, about 82 per cent of households and businesses receive that level of service. The CRTC wants that increased to 90 per cent by 2021.

ISPs will also be required to offer unlimited data options for fixed broadband services.

"Access to broadband internet service is vital and a basic telecommunication service all Canadians are entitled to receive," said CRTC chairman Jean-Pierre Blais.

As part of the decision, telecom firms will have access to an escalating $750-million industry-sponsored fund over the next five years to invest in broadband infrastructure.

The first $100 million of that will come from a fund that currently subsidizes telephone services in isolated regions. THE CANADIAN PRESS

EMPLOYMENT

Face-to-face crucial for young job seekers

A new report from the federal government's expert panel on youth employment points to a need to move away from digital services for young, first-time job seekers and instead offer more person-to-person contacts and services.

In an interim report released Wednesday, the panel described how young people complete hundreds of online job applications without receiving any response from employers and that the reliance on using personal networks to find jobs is unreasonably high.

> **We are deluding ourselves if we think digitizing the job application process makes it more democratic.**
> Vass Bednar

Young people with the most success at landing a job do so through the people they know and for those without such a network, the necessity to build connections can be overly intimidating, the report said.

"We are deluding ourselves if we think that by digitizing the job application process we are making it more democratic. Network effects are as strong as ever and this hurts young people with less social capital," said panel chairwoman Vass Bednar.

The panel's interim report found young Canadians have high levels of anxiety about their future work prospects, even those with post-secondary education and previous job experience — two keys frequently cited as an avenue to a good job.

A Statistics Canada study released earlier this month showed that young people have seen their job quality decline over 40 years, even as the youth unemployment rate has remained relatively unchanged. In both 1976 and 2015 it was 2.3 times higher than the rate among those aged 25 and older.

The Liberals made sweeping promises to young Canadians as part of their election platform. THE CANADIAN PRESS

HOUSING

Homes less affordable

RBC Economics Research says owning a home in Canada is less affordable now than at any time in nearly eight years with the average affordability measure set at 44.3 per cent. The report also shows that for the first time in almost two years, Greater Toronto pushed the Vancouver area from top spot as the city with the most significant erosion in affordability. THE CANADIAN PRESS

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metro VIEWS
Your essential daily news
Thursday, December 22, 2016

CHANTAL HÉBERT ON POLITICAL NEWS' DECENTRALIZATION

The days when there was something special or newsworthy about a broadcaster serving up a prime minister to a festive nation have gone.

Once a staple of the holiday news season, the televised prime ministerial fireside chats are well on the way to joining the ghosts of Christmases past.

The CBC and Radio-Canada — among others — have opted out of the format, rightly concluding that the days when there was something special or, for that matter, newsworthy about deferentially serving up a prime minister to a festive nation had gone.

So have the days when a government leader had to rely on a handful of major networks to reach a national audience.

Interviews with the prime minister are a dime a dozen this December. On top of various year-end Parliament Hill interviews and a news conference, Trudeau has spent the past week on a year-end tour.

At the end of last week, he was in Montreal taking questions from Radio-Canada viewers. This week he spent time in Vancouver and Calgary.

There was a time when a contingent of Parliament Hill reporters would have tagged along. But trips outside the parliamentary precinct are so few now, as it is possible to catch Trudeau live in action from one's computer at no cost to media organizations.

This year marked the 150th anniversary of the Parliamentary Press Gallery. For its members, it was a bittersweet occasion.

In tandem with the larger journalism universe the gallery's membership has been shrinking. That may be even truer of the institution's collective influence. The challenging economics of journalism tell only part of the story.

When I came to Parliament Hill in the late '80s, Le Devoir's Montreal-based justice reporter would hop on a bus and travel to Ottawa every time the Supreme Court released a major ruling.

Collecting it in person was the only way to get the text of a decision on the day it was rendered. For that reason, larger news organizations often based their justice reporter on Parliament Hill.

With the exception of the televised House debates, pretty much anything that happened around or on the Hill was only accessible to journalists who were physically present on the premises. It was impossible to keep up with the narrative at a distance from the capital. The members of the gallery truly were the ears and eyes of Canadians on Parliament Hill for more than a century.

These days, most of the fireworks in Canadian political news comes from reporters and commentators outside Ottawa.
THE CANADIAN PRESS FILE

But today, the Globe and Mail's André Picard writes the most authoritative health-policy column on offer … from Montreal.

In English as in French, the bulk of the immigration and foreign-policy commentary and analysis no longer emanates from Parliament Hill bureaus.

Every year, the budget lockup draws a gaggle of columnists and editorialists who normally toil in Montreal and Toronto. With access to federal finance documents at the tip of anyone's fingers, more fiscal policy coverage than ever is done outside the federal capital. And, of course, it is no longer necessary to have a desk a few blocks down from the Supreme Court to obtain its rulings in real time.

The much-watched At Issue panel on CBC's The National has never had a permanent member whose exclusive workplace was Parliament Hill. (I have been splitting my time between the federal capital and Montreal for 20 years.) And yet parliamentary insiders regularly vote it as the most influential media panel.

Over the years, a lot of policy expertise and knowledge has been farmed out of the press gallery, and, with it, many of the relationships that ministers and mandarins used to nurture with those who were on the beats that pertained to their portfolios.

As a consequence but also as the result of the practice of clickbaiting, the ratio of politics reporting versus public policy coverage coming out of the parliamentary press has steadily increased. The press gallery has become more diverse but polls suggest its output has tended to become less germane to the priorities of voters.

Parliament Hill remains the only place in the country where conflicting political currents come to clash. The dynamics are a must-watch for anyone who wants to understand how complex Canada is. That is not easily done via a computer screen.

It is impossible to imagine national political coverage without a parliamentary component. But regardless of their number, the daily reporting of Parliament Hill media insiders is probably no more likely to be restored to pride of place in the national conversation than the cosy fireside chats of the not-so-distant past.

Chantal Hébert is a national affairs writer.

Over the years, a lot of policy expertise and knowledge has been farmed out of the parliamentary press gallery.

VICKY MOCHAMA

It's better to give than to receive, but taking has its place, too

In the lead-up to the Plunderer-Elect of the United States taking the oath of office, it's become clear that this is the Age of the Thief.

Almost every cabinet appointment seems designed to enrich either the Trumps or their billionaire friends. Trump is draining the swamp but only so he can sell the water back to the thirsty swamp dwellers in gold-embossed bottles.

The next four years will consist of so many bold acts of theft. And not just in the United States.

In Toronto, police are searching for a white male who has robbed five downtown banks in the last month. However, knowing that the public loves a criminal they can cheer for — hello, all superheroes — the police have adorably named him the "lunchtime bandit." Such creativity from a force that has only managed to come up with Black Male Known To Police for so many other suspects.

(If I'm ever arrested, please tell the police my moniker is White Woman.)

The robber is brazen but only because he knows that no one suspects clean-cut white men of crimes. He can simply slide a note to a teller saying he's armed and be out of there in minutes.

According to Staff Insp. Mike Earl, this particular perp might not be all bad. "Maybe he's never been in trouble before," he said. "Maybe he's an educated individual who's down and out and this is his only hope to get some kind of money."

That is exactly the kind of empathy that we'll need in the coming years. No one is a criminal anymore! Donald Trump isn't a fascist and a kleptocrat. He's just "an educated individual" trying to make a living.

For that reason, Doris Payne is my Pilferer of the Year. Doris is an international jewel thief who has spent over five decades stealing expensive jewelry. And getting away with it. My girl Doris, who is 86, was arrested just last week for stealing a necklace in suburban Atlanta.

While former stockbroker and convicted fraudster Jordan Belfort got an Oscar-worthy portrayal by Leonardo DiCaprio, Doris's 50 years of high-stakes thievery has so far only generated rumours of a Halle Berry-attached biopic.

(DiCaprio himself seems to like a scammer; he also played conman-turned-FBI consultant Frank Abagnale in 2002's Catch Me If You Can.)

Doris Payne's story is like the Thomas Crowne Affair meets the Best Exotic Marigold Hotel, but starring a fabulous and unrepentant black woman. What does a black woman have to steal to get Viola Davis to play her?

In this season of giving, let's not forget to celebrate the takers.

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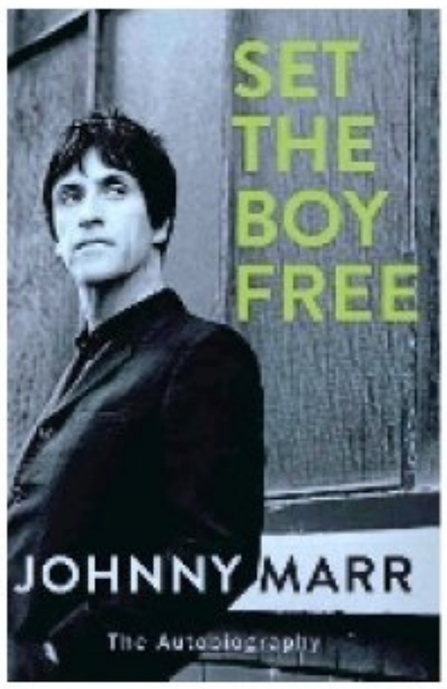
Your essential daily news

Movie magic is real: Disney is first studio to break $7 billion globally at the box office this year

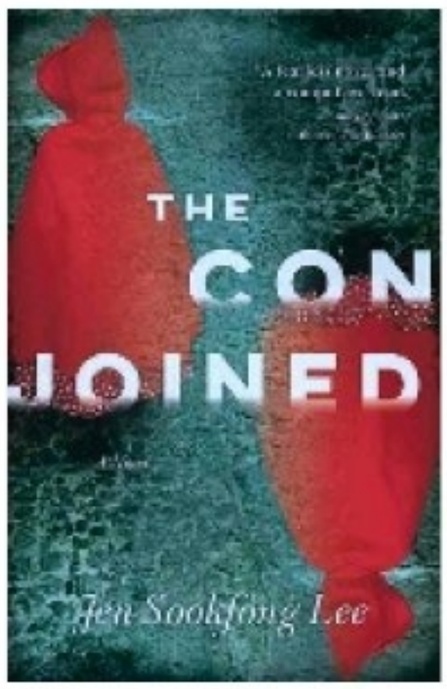
Overlooked but wonderful reads

With thousands of books published each year, narrowing down a new holiday read or gift can be daunting. There are the award winners and the bestsellers, the book club picks and the big names. But if you're looking for something a little different, here are five titles worth seeking out: **SUE CARTER/FOR METRO**



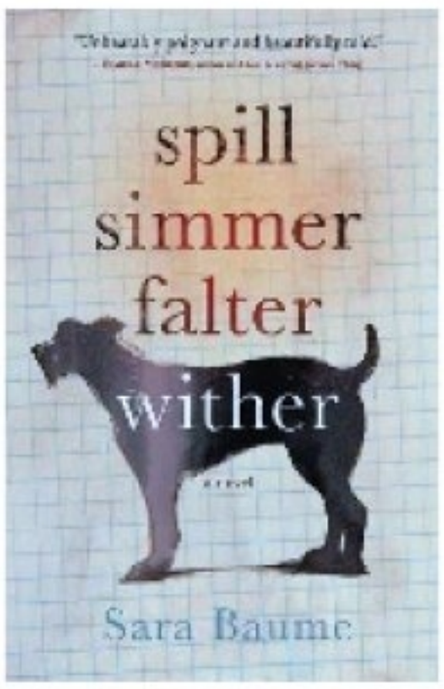
The fascinating Mr Smiths

In a year dominated by memoirs from Bruce Springsteen, Amy Schumer and Carrie Fisher, it was easy to miss Johnny Marr's **Set the Boy Free**. Marr and Morrissey, who co-formed the beloved 1980s band the Smiths, became as famous for their contentious break-up as their writing partnership. But Marr's entertaining autobiography keeps the mudslinging to a minimum, delivering a delightful history of a life dedicated to music.



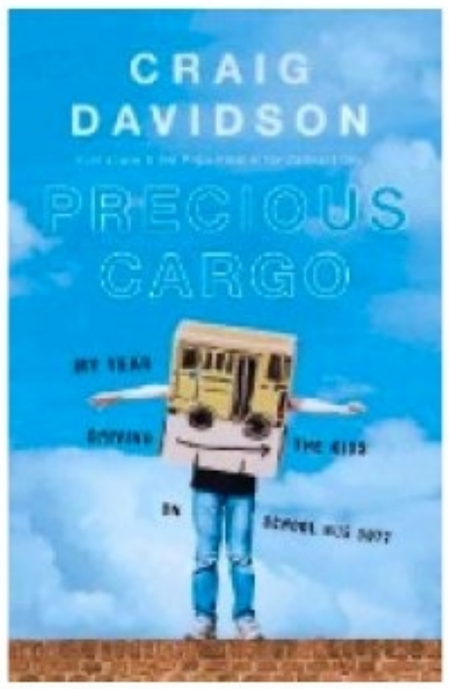
Thrill ride through Vancouver

Vancouver author Jen Sookfong Lee combines literary and crime fiction in her third novel **The Conjoined**, about a social worker who discovers the bodies of two girls — who turn out to be long-missing troubled foster children — in her recently deceased mother's freezers. Lee draws from Vancouver's social history, pop culture and an exploration of family dynamics for a woman-focused, refreshing take on the traditional thriller.



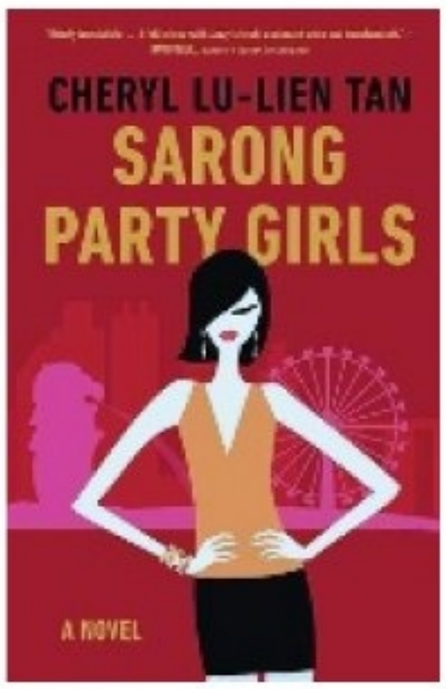
Man and dog in dark times

Before it was published in Canada this year, Irish writer Sara Baume received a long list of accolades in the U.K. for her debut novel **Spill Simmer Falter Wither**, set in a small village inspired by her own home. Baume breathes new life into an old trope about a man and his dog, with beautiful, lyrical language and a startling, dark conclusion. This is one of the most quietly devastating books of the year.



A funny, charming bus journey

Craig Davidson has earned a tough-guy reputation, both for his hard-hitting books (and the film adaptation of Rust and Bone) and his horror-writing pseudonym Nick Cutter. In his charming memoir **Precious Cargo: My Year of Driving the Kids on School Bus 3077**, the Calgary author recalls a tough period when he took a job driving a bus for special-needs students, proving that he is also sensitive and empathetic, with a sharp sense of humour.



Single women on a mission

Journalist Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan's first novel, **Sarong Party Girls**, explores the lives of Jazzy and her friends, all twenty-something Singapore women on a mission to snag rich *ang moh* (Western expat) husbands and to give birth to "Chanel babies." Told in 'Singlish' — a hybrid patois of Singaporean English — Tan, who did plenty of research to capture the scene, exposes a sordid but fascinating world of nightclubs and lounges ruled by racism and misogyny.

Lena Dunham said she would never intentionally 'trivialize the challenges of terminating a pregnancy.' THE ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

Dunham apologizes over 'joke'

ENTERTAINMENT

On her podcast star said she wished she had an abortion

Lena Dunham has apologized for saying she wished she had an abortion. Dunham made the comment on last week's episode of her Women of the Hour podcast, while talking about a self-realization.

She said that, even though she speaks against stigmatizing abortion, she found herself saying adamantly that she had never had one when she was asked to be part of a project involving women discussing their abortions.

In reference to this contradiction, she said: "Now, I can say that I still haven't had an abortion, but I wish I had."

The comment drew criticism online.

On Tuesday, the Girls star apologized on Instagram for what she called "a distasteful joke."

She said she "would never, ever intentionally trivialize the emotional and physical challenges of terminating a pregnancy."

"My only goal is to increase awareness and decrease stigma," Dunham added. "I take reproductive choice in America more seriously than I take literally anything else, and therefore own full responsibility for any words I speak that don't convey this truth clearly.

"My life is and always will be devoted to reproductive justice and freedom."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CELEBS ON INSTAGRAM

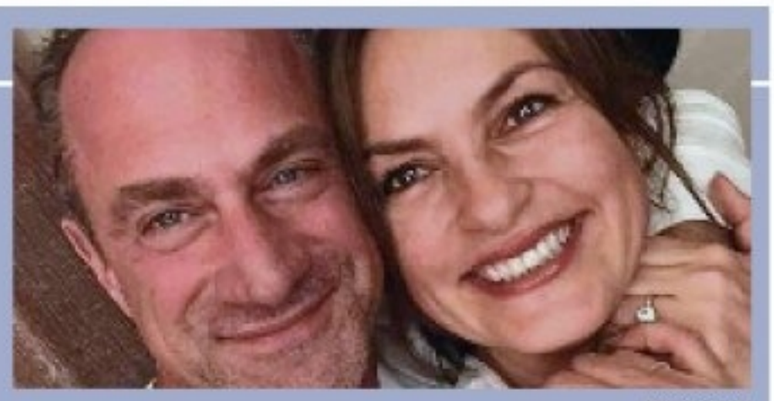
SVU crew's reunion

Former Law & Order: Special Victims Unit co-stars Mariska Hargitay and Christopher Meloni are celebrating the season with a holiday selfie.

Meloni posted a picture of himself with his arm around Hargitay on his Instagram on Tuesday, along with the caption, "Friends at Xmas." Meloni and Hargitay starred in SVU for 12 seasons before Meloni left in a contract dispute.

They have reunited on several occasions since, including at a 2013 event for Hargitay's Joyful Heart Foundation charity.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



INSTAGRAM

JOHANNA SCHNELLER
WHAT I'M WATCHING

Real-life Jeopardy more than a game

THE SHOW: Jeopardy, December 20, 2016
THE MOMENT: The sixth win

The late Cindy Stowell pictured with Alex Trebek. CONTRIBUTED

You could feel North America holding its breath. Cindy Stowell, who died from colon cancer on December 5th, was still alive on Jeopardy, after winning five games in a row. (She taped her games in August. The producers and host Alex Trebek knew of her condition; her opponents didn't.)

But here in the sixth game, things are looking dire for the tiny, soft-spoken science content developer with the chic pixie haircut. She enters the final jeopardy round well behind opponent Julia Kite. The question is insanely specific: "If this U.S. state was a country, it would have been in the top 10 in gold medals with 14 — 9 of them by one man and one woman."

Cindy unveils her answer: Maryland. Correct (Michael Phelps is a Marylander). She unveils her wager: $10,201.00. That puts her one dollar ahead of Julia.

Julia unveils her answer: Ohio. America whoops.

You don't really think of Jeopardy as a marketing mastermind, but they are handling this expertly. They kept Cindy's illness quiet for her first few games. As she approached win number five, a story appeared in The New York Times, and went viral.

Now, at the end of this divisive year, Americans of all stripes are gathering before their TVs as if they're hearths, at that time of evening when the holiday lights begin to twinkle, to root together for someone because she's tough and humble and intelligent.

Cindy's six-day total is $103,803, which she's donating to cancer research. Expect high ratings for tonight's show. Somewhere, Charles Dickens is smiling.

Johanna Schneller is a media connoisseur who zeroes in on pop-culture moments. She appears Monday through Thursday.

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Bringing back an old-school Legend

INTERVIEW

Singer's role in La La Land sees him return to musical past

When he was a kid, multiple Grammy winner John Legend was in high school musicals, including You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown and Fiddler on the Roof. So perhaps it was in the cards for him to take on two roles in La La Land, a movie being credited with re-energizing the classic genre.

Written and directed by Damien Chazelle, La La Land opens on Christmas Day.

Legend is both an executive producer on the film and acts and sings onscreen as hit-seeking bandleader Keith. To prepare for the part, Legend worked with an acting coach and learned to play guitar. He also wrote the song he performs with co-star Ryan Gosling, Start a Fire.

Legend's Keith is a longtime friend of jazz musician Sebastian (Gosling), who seems far away from his dream of opening his own club. Keith's band is enjoying success with a far more commercial sound than the purity that Sebastian champions. When Keith offers him a job, it comes at a cost to Sebastian's relationship with struggling actress Mia (Emma Stone) and his vow to stay loyal to his music.

A co-writer on Glory, a Best Original Song Oscar winner from the film Selma, Legend sat down during the Toronto International Film Festival for a Canadian exclusive interview to talk about his work in La La Land.

What job came first: the executive producer or the acting?
It was all kind of bundled together in the same conversation. They wanted me to write a song for (La La Land) and possibly perform in it as an actor . . . and come on as an executive producer to help with the music. But (Chazelle) held out the possibility that he might want me to play Keith and I looked at the role and said, 'Yeah, I could do this.' I understand Keith as a character, and it's something I think I (could) do. Damien took a leap of faith because he had never seen me act before. He had to just speculate that I might be good at it and I think he's OK with his decision now.

We don't know much about the friendship between Sebastian and Keith. Did you work out a backstory?
We talked about that with Damien and basically the idea was that these guys probably went to music school together and they both kind of have the same foundation as talented musicians who come up through the jazz school of thought, but one of them decides to cleave through that tradition more and the other one decides to kind of push himself beyond the boundaries of what traditional jazz would allow. Damien didn't want one to be perceived as inherently better than the other, but just different choices. This has been seen in films before, this idea of selling your soul for rock'n'roll. Right. And so (Chazelle) wanted that tension, but he also didn't want Keith to be a crappy musician that everyone thought, 'Well, that's terrible.' He wanted it to be a viable option; this is good in its own way. It's different from what Gosling's character's trying to do, but it's still a viable option.

You feel their story, you understand what it's like to have a dream and to want to pursue that.
John Legend

John Legend with Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling in La La Land. DALE ROBINETTE/ENTERTAINMENT ONE

Why do you want to be involved with movies?
I've always loved history and . . . a lot of the films that we get involved with and the television shows we get involved with are kind of historically based. And I think film has a power to connect in a really powerful way and a beautiful way, and I love the interaction of film and music, and most of it in things I work on have that interaction where we write songs for it. For instance, Underground, a television show that we produced (for WGN America), we were very involved in the music, so I feel like it's an extension of my music career and my career as a storyteller and as an artist.

Are movie musicals an old-fashioned concept?
Great stories never go out of style. Great characters never go out of style. Great filmmaking never goes out of style. And I think the power of this film is that you feel a real human connection to Sebastian and Mia, you feel their story, you understand what it's like to have a dream and to want to pursue that. It's really great writing and great dancing, great performances. What's not to like? Even if this genre is supposedly on life support, I think Damien certainly provided enough jolt to it and reinvigorated it for 2016.

How does Ryan Gosling hold up as a musician?
Oh, he's so good! He really worked on being a great pianist for this and I was so impressed. And they (Stone and Gosling) sound great together, their singing and their dancing is just magical. It kind of took me by surprise to see how beautifully they were dancing together.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

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- Willowbrook Shopping Centre

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- Woodgrove Centre

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PENTICTON
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LIQUID ASSETS
PETER ROCKWELL

Three perfect partners for the big bird

What wine goes with turkey? When you write about booze, you hear that question more than White Christmas at seasonal get-togethers.

Truth be told, the big bird is pretty accommodating when it comes to a liquid partner. The ideal match is actually less about the meat and more about the side dishes which, on December 25th, can be anything from herbaceous and earthy to sweet and tangy. Here are three perfect, all-purpose pairings.

Moselland 2014 Ars Vitis Riesling ($11.95-$15.99): One for those who like a hint of sweetness. Easy-drinking, and in-law friendly, with its cool window label design this German drinks as good as it looks.

Lindemans 2014 Bin 65 Chardonnay ($10.95-$12.99): Dry and lightly oaked, it's a Down Under white layered with bright tropical fruit and balanced acidity.

Kim Crawford 2015 South Island Pinot Noir ($19.95-$21.99): For the red lovers, a New Zealander that combines ripe, New World flavours with old-school European sophistication.

From me to you, have a safe and happy holidays.

Prices reflect the range across the country. Some products may not be available in all provinces.

Weaving a basket of festive delights

Adding cream cheese to your cookie dough helps to keep your Christmas cookies softer and lighter in texture with a tangier flavour too. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

RECIPE

Nutty cookies forgiving for those without nimble fingers

Chocolatey and nutty with a fairly light texture thanks to the cream cheese, this recipe is adapted from this year's Better Homes and Gardens' Christmas Cookies issue.

They were originally pinwheel shapes but the basket shape that comes from folding all the cookie flaps is also lovely. This shape is also more forgiving for those who don't have nimble fingers.

Cookie tip: Experiment with cream cheese in cookie dough by replacing 1/4 cup of the butter with the same amount of full fat cream cheese to get a softer, lighter texture with a soft tanginess.

Chocolate-Hazelnut Baskets

Makes 32 cookies.

Ingredients:

- 32 whole shelled hazelnuts
- 3/4 cup (185 mL) room temperature unsalted butter
- 1/4 cup (60 mL) softened cream cheese
- 2/3 cup (160 mL) granulated sugar
- 1/2 tsp (2 mL) baking powder
- 1/4 tsp (1 mL) salt
- 1 egg
- 1 tsp (5 mL) vanilla extract
- 2 cups (500 mL) all-purpose flour
- 1/4 cup (60 mL) unsweetened cocoa powder
- 2/3 cup (160 mL) Nutella, chilled in fridge

Directions:

1. Spread hazelnuts in a shallow baking pan. Bake for 5 to 10 minutes, or until nuts are slightly browned and fragrant, shaking pan halfway to prevent burning. Let cool and rub off skins with paper towel. Set aside.

2. In a stand mixer with a paddle attachment at medium speed or a large bowl with a mixer on medium, beat butter and cream cheese till fluffy, about 30 seconds. Add sugar, baking powder and salt. Mix for another 2 minutes, scraping down sides of bowl. Mix in egg and vanilla until well-incorporated. Divide dough in half.

3. Roll each dough ball into a 10-inch (25 cm) square between sheets of parchment paper on a clean work surface. Cut out 16, 2 1/2-inch (6 cm) squares. Place squares 1-inch (2.5 cm) apart on a lined baking sheet. Refrigerate for 30 minutes.

4. With a knife, cut 1-inch (2.5 cm) slits from each corner to centre. Spoon 1/2 teaspoon of Nutella into centre of each cookie. Fold every tip into centre to form a basket shape. Lightly press toasted hazelnut into centre where corners meet.

5. Bake at 350F (175 C) for 10 to 15 minutes or until edges are firm and edges are slightly puffed. Cool for 5 minutes before transferring to wire racks to cool completely.

6. Store in an airtight container for up to a week or freeze for up to a month.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

metro THE KIT REPORT

#YVR INDEX

The Kit Compact—Canada's beauty and fashion brand—brings you Vancouver's best holiday style

DESK TO PARTY

Sure, the holiday event circuit is stressful, but Lotte Davis, the CEO and co-founder of Vancouver's AG Hair, is here to help. We hit her up for tried-and-true styling tricks that will take you easily from office meeting to late-night cocktails in Railtown.

BALMAIR

TOUSLED WAVES

"Work two pumps of texturizer into towel-dried hair. Curl hair in alternating directions with an iron. Let the curls cool, then lightly finger comb, adding more texturizer to the ends."

AG HAIR CARE TEXTURE GLOSS, $24, CHATTERS.CA

ERDEM

LOW CHIGNON

"Dry shampoo adds a lot of volume and a bit of grit to the hair, making this style easier to achieve. Pull some strands of hair out around your face to create an effortless look."

AG HAIR CARE SIMPLY DRY SHAMPOO, $25, CHATTERS.CA

CAROLINA HERRERA

STRAIGHT AND SLEEK

"Comb hair prior to flat-ironing—this will add more slip to the iron, helping the smoothing process. Then split hair into sections and straighten one at a time."

—*Natasha Bruno*

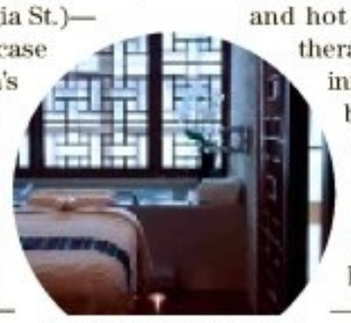
AG HAIR CARE THE OIL, $18, CHATTERS.CA

RUNWAY PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER STIGTER.

MUST-TRY: **THE CHI SPA AT THE SHANGRI-LA HOTEL**

Sometimes all you need is an after-work express facial, and sometimes you need a full-on half-day spa experience. When the latter urge arises, book the Sea Therapy Facial at the Chi spa (1128 West Georgia St.)—the perfect showcase for the Shangri-La's luxe approach. In an elegantly appointed treatment room—complete with its own fireplace and relaxation lounge—an experienced facialist uses protein-rich seaweeds infused with amino acids and vitamins to detoxify and rejuvenate skin. The relaxation continues with a neck, hand and foot massage and hot and cool stone therapy, which fights inflammation. Post bliss, head to the spa deck and sip a fresh juice while overlooking the must-visit Saint Laurent boutique.

—*Laura deCarufel*



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FROM THE EDITORS OF THE KIT compact

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metro HOME
Your essential daily news

A snow globe starring a loved one makes a great DIY gift

MEET THE CONDO

Waterfront views

CONTRIBUTED

Project overview

The Peninsula is a condo and townhouse development by Aragon Properties situated next to the Fraser River in New Westminster. The development features 163 units ranging from one to three bedrooms at a cost of $651 per square foot average. Construction is scheduled for completion in 2017. Units are available for sale now.

Housing amenities

Homes are built with a large, open concept to encourage the water and mountain views while allowing light and air to circulate naturally. The building offers residents a lounge, 12-hour concierge, Jacuzzi and built-in barbeque on The Lookout with a number of other building amenities as well.

Location and transit

22nd Street SkyTrain Station is nearby connecting residents to Metropolis at Metrotown under 10 minutes. New Westminster Station is one stop the other way featuring Landmark Cinemas, award-winning restaurants, and Douglas College just up the hill. Those with vehicles can reach Burnaby, Downtown New Westminster, or Delta in minutes.

In the neighbourhood

The Peninsula is directly where the Fraser River parts, putting waterfront views on three sides of the building. The master-planned 52-acre community set in Port Royal is decades in the making. The building is surrounded by parks, playgrounds, waterfront walkways and a community garden while also being near Downtown New Westminster.

NEED TO KNOW

What: The Peninsula
Developer: Aragon Properties Ltd.
Builder: Aragon Properties Ltd.
Location: New Westminster
Building: High-rise condos and townhouses
Sizes: 741 to 2,331 sq. ft.
Model: One, two, and three bedrooms
Pricing: $651 per square foot average
Status: Selling
Occupancy: 2017
Sales centre: 260 Ewen Avenue, New Westminster
Contact: 604-544-2258, thepeninsula@aragon.ca
Website: aragon.ca

DESIGN

Make it a time-capsule holiday theme

Glen Peloso
For Torstar News Service

Holiday decor and accessories enjoy greater longevity when carried out with a plan. Avoiding the Christmas-exploded-in-here look is key, and decorating with a theme in a streamlined way is a straight-forward approach to achieving that. So how about the retro-inspired, vintage-vibe theme this season? Here are a few ways to do it:

Tree lights and ornaments

The focal point of most people's home decor is the Christmas tree. Original vintage bulbs came with metallic reflectors to disperse light and add a little sparkle.

Fast forward 60 years and the industry has come a long way with more safe and energy-efficient options, many of which are available this season with that hipster retro look at retailers such as Lowe's and Canadian Tire. Layer in light with strands of twinkle lights for depth and consider adding a collection of original or reproduction glass vintage ornaments, which can be found now at almost all retailers in the Christmas spirit.

Wrap it up

To keep with the theme, add mid-century detail to the wrapped gifts under your retro tree for a creatively cohesive look this season. I personally love this look from HomeSense, with the wonderful wrap, ribbon and tags that bring to life a sense of being revived from a time capsule.

Wrapped gifts make for great decor throughout the holidays.

Accessories

Part of the joy of season is the delight in finding and using beautiful elements of holiday decor.

Traditional choices, such as evergreen boughs, mistletoe, poinsettia and seasonally scented candles are always favourites. Adding playful and practical elements, such as a vintage radio-snow globe — spied at The Bay recently — or a vintage record player,

Glen Peloso is principal designer of Peloso Alexander Interiors. Contact him at pelosoalexander.com.

Vintage wrapping paper and labels are a great look this holiday season. HANDOUT

Top kitchen trends for 2017

IDEAS

Black and white, mix and match will blow up

Americans briefly scaled back the scope of home renovation projects after the recession began nearly a decade ago, says interior designer and HGTV Design Star judge Vern Yip. But even during the peak of that focus on smaller, more sustainable living, the size and complexity of kitchen designs continued to grow.

"The kitchen is the heart of the home," Yip says, and people see it as a good place to spend money and recoup the investment when they sell their home.

What's trending in kitchen design as 2017 approaches? We've asked Yip and two other interior design experts — Caleb Anderson, co-founder of the New York-based design firm Drake/Anderson, and Brian Patrick Flynn, interior designer for HGTV's Urban Oasis 2016 home giveaway — to share their favourite innovations and thoughts on which trending design choices will stand the test of time.

A Florida kitchen designed by Vern Yip. After several years of focus on gold and other yellow-hued metals, Yip says hardware finished in "silver metals" like pewter, nickel and chrome and designed in geometric shapes are now trending in kitchen hardware. VERN YIP VIA THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Think black and white

Black and white are the trendiest colours now for kitchen design, and Flynn points out that they're also timeless.

A black and white palette works with virtually any accent colour, he says, so "if you go black and white, you really only have to spend once."

Right now, "black appliances with more of a matte finish" are among Flynn's favourites.

Yip says cabinets in both black and white are popular, and look great mixed together.

That's another trend all three designers are seeing: upper and lower cabinets done in different finishes and materials. Anderson recently designed a kitchen in London that has upper cabinets made of metal and glass, with lower cabinets made of cerused wood. "They need to complement each other," he says, "but everything doesn't have to match."

Get creative

Anderson also notes that it's popular to design a kitchen island out of different materials than the cabinets and countertops. That puts a personal stamp on the room, especially if you make your island out of a distinctive piece of furniture, like a vintage cabinet.

By using popular materials in unique ways, you can design a kitchen that feels current but won't look dated as trends change. Flynn is fan of that approach: For HGTV's Urban Oasis giveaway house this year, he chose a reflective, black marble mosaic tile for the kitchen walls, from the counter all the way up to the ceiling. The look is on-trend, but has a classic beauty that won't need renovating in a few years.

He also used concrete for the countertops, a popular option now but one with a classic simplicity. Along with concrete, Anderson and Yip says quartz countertops are popular. Quartz is more durable than marble, which can easily stain, and more consistent in colour throughout a large slab. Textured and colored glass is another way to jump on a trend in ways that reflect your own style, Anderson says. He's seeing glass used to surround the hoods above stoves, for backsplashes, and as cabinet fronts.

Mix your metals

Gold, brass and other yellow-toned metal finishes have been popular for several years, says Yip, and now white metal finishes like chrome, pewter and stainless steel are catching on too.

> **The hardware in your kitchen is sort of like the jewelry.**
> Vern Yip

Anderson recently used a mix of black and steel finishes in one kitchen, along with brass.

All three designers suggest going with your favourites and feeling free to mix and match.

"The hardware in your kitchen is sort of like the jewelry," and you can have fun adding that bit of bling, Yip says. Changing your hardware is a nice way to update the kitchen without having to change the cabinets.

You can also bring in a light fixture with a metal that's different from your cabinet hardware. Yip is seeing many clients opting to splurge on dramatic lighting in the kitchen, rather than in the dining room.

"The old way of thinking is you spend thousands of dollars on the crystal chandelier over the dining table, but lighting over the kitchen was practical," he says. Now, there's more emphasis on kitchen lighting "that doesn't feel functional but has a really polished esthetic quality."

Tech isn't an afterthought

Flynn used a WiFi-enabled oven (easily controlled from a smartphone) in the Urban Oasis house, as well as a refrigerator equipped with cameras accessible from a digital app, so you can see what you have inside it.

"While you are out, you can decide on the fly what to buy and bring home to be stocked up for dinner," he says.

Smaller appliances are a priority for many homeowners. "People tend to clutter their countertops with small appliances or put them in the cabinet and have to pull them out," Anderson says. So designers now routinely figure in storage space where small appliances can be concealed but easily accessed.

Also, says Anderson, "Clients have so many devices, smart devices," that they need "an area in the kitchen that's devoted to USB ports and chargers."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Geometric tiles "disrupted" by hardwood strip flooring add unexpected visual punch. NICOLAS VALLA

While it'll be a long time before your seedling will be ready for tinsel and lights, this project is very easy to get started.
LEE REICH/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Oh Christmas seedling: How to grow your own tree

GARDENING

This long-term project is very rewarding

Even during this holiday season, with winter upon us, you might find some gardening to do. Growing a Christmas tree from seed, for example.

That's no short-term proposition. But the long wait is offset by the wide selection of trees from which to choose, their negligible cost and — best of all — the satisfaction you get from growing your own tree. You're sure to eye your own, seed-grown Christmas tree with more affection than you've ever felt toward a tree loaded onto the roof of your car from a sales lot.

It's late in the season, but you could collect seed yourself if you know of some nice-looking, mature trees of species suitable for decorating and keeping through the holidays indoors. The most popular trees for this purpose include Scotch pine (Pinus sylvestris), white pine (Pinus strobus), Norway spruce (Picea abies), Douglas fir (Pseudotsuga menziesii), balsam fir (Abies balsamea) and white fir (Abies concolour).

Then again, your choices need not be limited to those popular species. Maybe your taste runs toward a tree with the long, languid needles of a Himalayan pine (Pinus Wallichiana) or the stubby, bluish needles of a Colorado blue spruce (Picea pungens).

Most conifers ripen their seeds in late summer or early fall, the cones' scales spreading to disperse their seeds in the weeks or months that follow. If you lay hands on some intact, mature cones, put them in a paper or burlap bag so their seeds won't be lost when the cones open, a process that can be speeded up by keeping them warm or even heating them a bit.

The other option, of course, is to buy the seeds.

Many conifer seeds will sprout quite readily if sown fresh out of their cones, although sprouting is often erratic. Once stored though, they usually need some treatment before they'll come to life. Start that treatment — essentially an artificial winter — by soaking the seed for 24 hours; that's "autumn rain."

Then rinse the seeds well to wash away any germination inhibitors; drain; and put them into a plastic bag along with moist potting soil.

Seal the bag shut and put it in your refrigerator. The seeds need to sit in the moist coolness of the refrigerator for one to three months, after which they'll be convinced that winter is over and it's safe to sprout.

This treatment might be advisable even for freshly harvested seeds to improve or make less erratic their germination. Now, anyway, isn't the best time of year for seeds to be sprouting.

Leave that plastic bag tucked away in the back of your refrigerator until spring. Check it occasionally because once some seeds think winter is over, they are so eager to get started that they'll actually sprout in the refrigerator.

Conifer seedlings grow slowly and offer little competition to weeds, so when you do plant them, do so either in containers or in a carefully tended garden row.

Seedlings in containers need more watering care; seedlings out in the garden need only occasional watering, but close guarding against weed encroachment.

Neither the containers nor the garden row will be the plants' permanent home, just nursery areas. After a couple of seasons in the nursery, transplant the trees, which will still be quite small, to more permanent locations where they can grow until ready for cutting.

Plan on about 10 years until harvest, depending on growing conditions and the kind of tree. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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COAL HARBOUR

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A new NBA labour deal was reportedly on the verge of being finalized after owners voted Wednesday to approve a proposed seven-year CBA

Building a generational rivalry

Jack Eichel, left, and Connor McDavid JEN FULLER/GETTY IMAGES

NHL

McDavid leads the way in next marquee matchup

No matter where the Edmonton Oilers travel, captain Connor McDavid is confronted by the same questions and comparisons to the opposing team's star.

In Buffalo, it's Jack Eichel, who was selected second in the 2015 draft behind McDavid. In Toronto, it's Auston Matthews, the No. 1 pick last June.

In Pittsburgh, it's Sidney Crosby, the obvious measuring stick for the NHL's entire "Next Generation" crop of youngsters.

Intriguing as the discussions are, McDavid would prefer not to be involved.

"I think it can be a bit of a sideshow sometimes," the NHL's points leader said during a recent stop in Buffalo, where his budding rivalry with Eichel was broached. "It seems like there's a new guy everywhere we go."

The same applies to Oilers coach Todd McLellan, who enjoyed a firsthand glimpse of the league's top young stars while coaching the 23-and-under Team North America at the World Cup of Hockey in September.

2006

The last time the Oilers qualified for the playoffs.

"You'd like to capture that and reproduce it during the winter, but that's really, really hard to do with 82 games and 30 teams," McLellan said. "But for us, I get asked those questions night after night after night."

McLellan would rather place the focus on his entire squad and not just McDavid, who at 19 has enough weight on his shoulders.

"Ryan Nugent-Hopkins is a former first overall pick, Leon Draisaitl: these players have to not take a backseat," McLellan said. "They have to step up and lead as well. And Connor can't do it by himself every night."

Team versus individual aside, the comparisons won't stop any time soon. And in years to come, the buzz will increase particularly once the torch of the NHL's marquee matchup, which used to be Wayne Gretzky versus Mario Lemieux, is passed on from Crosby versus Alex Ovechkin.

NBC broadcaster Pierre McGuire is intrigued by the many possibilities, all of which involve McDavid, whom he already regards as the league's second-best player behind Crosby.

Aside from Eichel and Matthews, McGuire points to the Winnipeg Jets' young tandem of Mark Scheifele and Patrik Laine as natural rivals to McDavid. Unlike Toronto and Buffalo, who play in the Eastern Conference and meet Edmonton just twice a season, the Jets play in the West.

The prospect of seeing the Canadian-born McDavid facing off against the U.S.-born Eichel led McGuire to lobby the NHL to continue playing on the international stage.

"That's why we have to go to the Olympics, for this to flesh out," he said. "That's what creates a lot of these gigantic rivalries." THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Canucks still in search of 60-minute effort

It has become a familiar and troubling trend for the Vancouver Canucks.

They fall behind early — often looking half asleep from the opening faceoff, like they're surprised the game started on time — before steadying the ship and then frantically pressing late, desperately trying to erase a deficit.

There have been other times, albeit not nearly as many, when the club plays well out of the gate only to suffer a third-period collapse.

Thirty-three games into 2016-17, the Canucks are still looking for that elusive complete effort.

"Sometimes we have good starts, sometimes we have bad endings," veteran forward Jannik Hansen said following Tuesday's 4-1 win over the Winnipeg Jets, a game Vancouver trailed 1-0 after the first period. "If we knew the answer to that we'd play 60 good minutes every single night."

> **We are going to want the next one a little bit more.**
> Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck

Vancouver (14-16-3) has allowed the first goal a stunning 25 times, including in each of the first three outings of the club's current four-game homestand.

The Jets (15-17-3), meanwhile, were left frustrated Tuesday after peppering Canucks goalie Jacob Markstrom early.

Winnipeg — which is two points up on Vancouver, but has played two more games — could have easily led by two or three, but instead let the Canucks hang around before eventually falling to 5-11-2 on the road.

In a scheduling quirk, Vancouver hosts Winnipeg for a second straight game on Thursday before visiting Calgary Friday.

Jets captain Blake Wheeler said the rematch shouldn't present many surprises.

"We have a pretty good idea of what they are trying to do," said Wheeler, who scored his team's only goal Tuesday. "I think they are going to have a pretty good idea of what we're trying to do. It's going to be a matter of wills." THE CANADIAN PRESS

LIONS

Elimimian signs on for two more years

Solomon Elimimian is staying put.

The 30-year-old linebacker agreed Wednesday to a contract extension that will keep him with the B.C. Lions through the 2018 season.

The six-foot, 227-pound Elimimian made CFL history in 2014 by becoming the first pure defensive player to capture the league's outstanding player award. He was also its top defensive performer that year.

> **This is where I want to finish my career.**
> Solomon Elimimian

But the three-time CFL all-star said the 2016 season was his most satisfying. Elimimian posted a league-best 129 tackles, eight sacks, one interception and one forced fumble to earn his second top defensive player honour coming off a career-threatening Achilles injury in 2015.

"I think so just because of how hard it was for me to come back," Elimimian said.

"I think last year was one that transcended football and my accomplishments because when I look back 20, 30 years from now, this will be something I went through and overcame that helped me grow as a person." THE CANADIAN PRESS

NHL

Second most points is 'like No. 1' to Jagr

Jaromir Jagr knows No. 2 is as high as he'll go on the NHL career scoring list.

In his mind, that's a record in itself.

Jaromir Jagr GETTY IMAGES

Jagr's next point will be the 1,888th of his career and give him outright possession of second place on the all-time NHL points list, breaking a tie with Mark Messier. Only Wayne Gretzky's total of 2,857 is better than that, and Jagr — the 44-year-old Florida Panthers forward who has said he can see himself playing until he's 50 — knows the top spot is going to stay far from his reach.

"For me, it's like No. 1," Jagr said recently when asked what passing Messier would mean. "I don't really count Wayne Gretzky. He was from another planet. I don't think he was from this planet. Whatever he did, it's unbreakable."

Jagr caught Messier on Tuesday with a three-assist effort in Florida's shootout win over Buffalo. His next chance for the tiebreaker is Thursday, when the Panthers play host to the Boston Bruins.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

IN BRIEF

Whitecaps to begin 2017 season in Philadelphia

The Vancouver Whitecaps will open the 2017 MLS season against the Philadelphia Union on March 5 at BC Place Stadium.

The league announced the home openers for all 22 clubs on Wednesday. The rest of the schedule will be released in January.

Expansion Minnesota United FC will kick off in front of the Timbers Army on March 3 in Portland.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

B.C. ski cross racers win silver, bronze medals

Germany's Heidi Zacher won gold Wednesday at the ski cross World Cup while Canadians Marielle Thompson and Georgia Simmerling joined her on the podium in Innichen, Italy.

Simmerling, from West Vancouver, had the lead for most of the big final before slipping to third. Thompson, from Whistler, took the silver to retain her lead in the season standings.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

MAKE IT TONIGHT

Comforting Slow Cooker Chicken Stew

PHOTO: MAYA VISNYEI

Ceri Marsh & Laura Keogh
For Metro Canada

Just a bit of prep in the morning and you'll come home to a satisfying dinner.

Ready in 6 hours 10 minutes
Prep time: 10 minutes
Serves 4

Ingredients
- 6 chicken thighs
- 1 potato, peeled and cubed
- 1 Tbsp vegetable oil
- 2 onions, chopped
- 4 stalks celery, chopped
- 2 carrots, peeled and chopped
- 1 Tbsp fresh thyme (1 tsp dried)
- 1 or 2 bay leaves
- 1/4 cup flour
- 2 cups low-sodium chicken stock
- 1 cup fresh or frozen peas
- 1/2 cup light cream

Directions

1. In a Dutch oven or high-sided skillet, sauté onions, celery and carrots in splash of vegetable oil for about five minutes.

2. Add flour, thyme and bay leaves and stir for a minute. Add stock and stir until smooth. Simmer for 3 or 4 minutes until sauce thickens.

3. Add the potatoes and good pinch of salt and pepper.

4. Place chicken thighs in the bottom of slow cooker and spoon the vegetable mixture over. Seal and set for 6 hours.

5. Add peas and cream and cook for 10 more minutes. Serve plain or over mashed potatoes.

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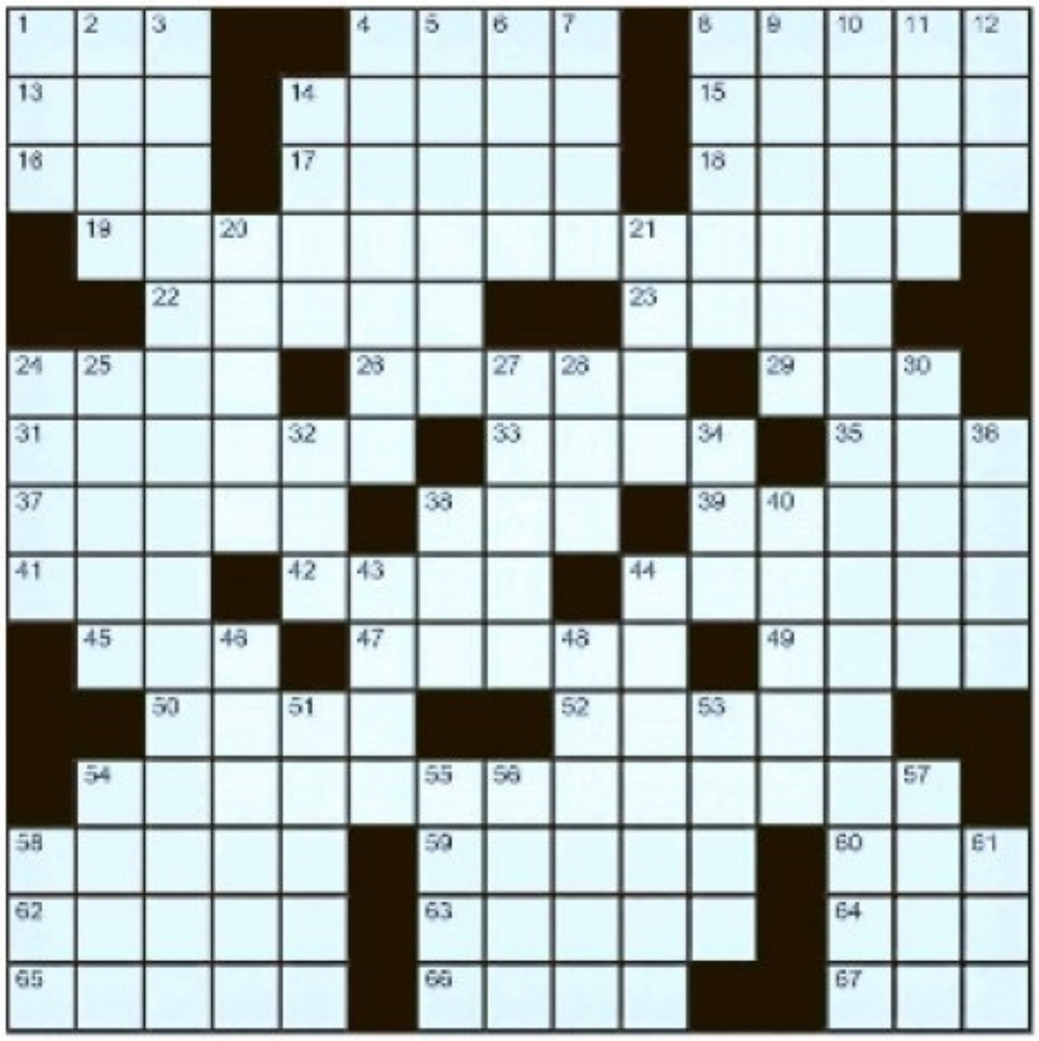
CROSSWORD Canada Across and Down

BY KELLY ANN BUCHANAN



ACROSS
1. Australian boot maker
4. Snowplow's creation
8. Cosmetics brand
13. For
14. Angels and Earthly Creatures writer, Elinor _
15. Jeweller's eye piece
16. Lawn roll
17. Chicago's airport
18. The _ (Poem by British poet William Blake)
19. Signs indicating that Santa and his delivery crew have just landed: 3 wds.
22. _ havoc
23. Nobel Peace Prize city
24. Money Object link: 2 wds.
26. French painter Mr. Dufy
29. Sotheby's fare
31. Liveliness
33. Mr. Kilmer's
35. Drummer Mr. Cool
37. Until this moment: 2 wds.
38. Tommy Jones connector
39. Laughs
41. Note before Lah
42. Air freshener target, variantly
44. Toronto college; or, Roman statesman
45. Never: German
47. On a ship, _ _ sea
49. Nero's 602
50. Coin insertion place
52. Canadian sweets shop, _ Secord
54. Bit of "We Three Kings of Orient Are": "Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying / Sealed in the _-_ _..."
58. Unflappable
59. Take apart shoelaces
60. Antiquity
62. _ _'oeuvre (Appetizer)
63. Self-righteous
64. Mr. Orbison
65. Showbiz performer Martha's
66. Canadian director Mr. Egoyan
67. _-inspiring

DOWN
1. Sit-_ (Exercises)
2. David of "Rhoda"
3. What it's predicted Rudolph will do at the end of his Christmas tune: 4 wds.
4. How to completely memorize something: 2 wds.
5. Sarah Palin's state
6. De _, Robert
7. Ardent
8. Some choral voices
9. One of Montreal's Concordia University campuses
10. Have fun with photos posing: 4 wds.
11. Imitates
12. "_ darn tootin'!"
14. Created tapestries
20. Storm aka _ Munroe, Halle Berry's character in "X-Men: Days of Future Past" (2014)
21. Bun
24. 'Violin' suffixes
25. Serving _ (Dinnertime utensil)
27. Obvious
28. Dubai's locale, commonly
30. Ms. Bingham of "Baywatch"
32. "Letters from _ Jima" (2006)
34. Particular pronoun
36. Mr. Morales
38. Mr. Ferrigno
40. Prefix meaning 'Male'
43. Fawn
44. The Olympic _, in Montreal
46. Author S.E. Hinton = Susan _ Hinton
48. The Beatles' 'Yellow Submarine' album tune: "It's _ _ Much"
51. Where musicians store their songs: 2 wds.
53. Driving 4x4s, commonly
54. Ancient colonnade
55. Lipton _-_-soup
56. Kool & The Gang's "Get Down _ _"
57. Gust
58. Stock unit [abbr.]
61. Hair tinter

IT'S ALL IN THE STARS Your daily horoscope by Francis Drake

Aries March 21 - April 20
This is a wonderful day to enjoy the company of others, especially partners and close friends. You also will enjoy dealing with members of the general public.

Taurus April 21 - May 21
Work-related travel is likely today. Fortunately, you feel upbeat and happy, especially relating to co-workers and customers. People will be honest and candid with you today.

Gemini May 22 - June 21
This is a fun-loving day! You will enjoy social outings, sports events and playful activities with children. Seek out opportunities to express your creative talents.

Cancer June 22 - July 23
Family conversations will go well today, especially with female relatives, moms and aunts. Explore real-estate opportunities; however, wait until tomorrow to act with purpose.

Leo July 24 - Aug. 23
Today you feel quite content with your world. This is why you will enjoy chatting with siblings, neighbors and relatives. It feels good to be upbeat and optimistic.

Virgo Aug. 24 - Sept. 23
This is an excellent day for business and commerce. Travelling for work is very likely. Nevertheless, postpone important financial decisions until tomorrow.

Libra Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
Today it's easy to feel sympathetic and generous to others. In part, this is because you feel fortunate, but you also have a concern for the welfare of those who are less fortunate.

Scorpio Oct. 24 - Nov. 22
You feel content today, which is why you are happy to work behind the scenes. Your busy pace lately has been a bit exhausting, and you know it!

Sagittarius Nov. 23 - Dec. 21
A conversation with a friend or a member of a group might encourage you to be more ambitious about your future goals. Consider these today; however, wait until tomorrow to finalize anything.

Capricorn Dec. 22 - Jan. 20
People notice you today. They might even learn information about you. Just be aware of this in case you want to guard your privacy. Be aware of your reputation.

Aquarius Jan. 21 - Feb. 19
Do something different today, because you are upbeat and eager to explore new situations. In particular, you want to learn something new that interests you. Travel if you can.

Pisces
Feb. 20 - March 20
In many ways, you will benefit from others today. Someone might do you a favor or make a promise. Wait to find out if this promise will ring true.

CONCEPTIS SUDOKU by Dave Green

Every row, column and box contains 1-9

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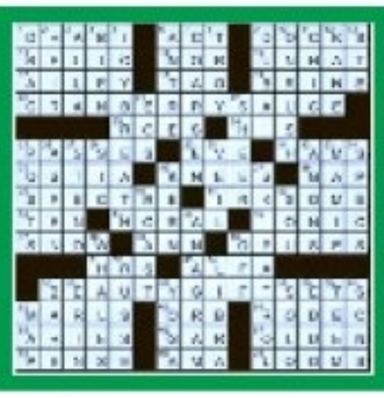

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4	7	5	2	1	6	8	9	3
9	3	6	5	4	8	7	2	1
6	5	2	1	3	9	4	8	7
3	4	7	8	6	2	1	5	9
8	1	9	4	5	7	6	3	2

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